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# NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

DECEMBER, 1920

## LIFE AND DEATH OF HARRIETT FREAN

A NOVEL

BY MAY SINCLAIR

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"Pussycat, Pussycat, where have you been?"

"I've been to London, to see the Queen."

"Pussycat, Pussycat, what did you there?"

"I caught a little mouse under the chair."

HER mother said it three times. And each time the Baby Harriett laughed. The sound of her laugh was so funny that she laughed again at that; she kept on laughing, with shriller and shriller squeals.

"I wonder why she thinks it's funny," her mother said.

Her father considered it. "I don't know. The cat perhaps. The cat and the Queen. But no; that isn't funny."

"She sees something in it we don't see, bless her," said her mother.

Each kissed her in turn, and the Baby Harriett stopped laughing suddenly.

"Mamma, *did* Pussycat see the Queen?"

"No," said Mamma: "Just when the Queen was passing the little mouse came out of its hole and ran under the chair. That's what Pussycat saw."

Every evening before bedtime she said the same rhyme and Harriett asked the same question.

When Nurse had gone she would lie still in her cot, waiting. The door would open, the big pointed shadow would move over the ceiling, the lattice shadow of the fireguard would fade and go away, and Mamma would come in car-

rying the lighted candle. Her face shone white between her long, hanging curls. She would stoop over the cot and lift Harriett up, and her face would be hidden in her curls. That was the kiss-me-to-sleep kiss. And when she had gone Harriett lay still again, waiting. Presently Papa would come in, large and dark in the firelight. He stooped and she leaped up into his arms. That was the kiss-me-awake kiss; it was their secret.

Then they played. Papa was the Pussycat and she was the little mouse in her hole under the bedclothes. They played till Papa said "*No more!*" and tucked the blankets tight in.

—"Now you're kissing like Mamma"—

Hours afterwards they would come again together and stoop over the cot and she wouldn't see them; they would kiss her with soft, light kisses and she wouldn't know.

She thought: To-night I'll stay awake and see them. But she never did. Only once she dreamed that she heard footsteps and saw the lightend candle, going out of the room; going, going away.

The blue egg stood on the marble top of the cabinet where you could see it from everywhere; it was supported by a gold waistband, by gold hoops and gold legs, and it wore a gold ball with a frill round it like a crown. You would never have guessed what was inside it. You touched a spring in its waistband and it flew open, and then it was a workbox. Gold scissors and thimble and stiletto sitting up in holes cut in white velvet.

The blue egg was the first thing she thought of when she came into the room. There was nothing like that in Connie Hancock's Papa's house. It belonged to Mamma.

Harriett thought: If only she could have a birthday and wake up and find that the blue egg belonged to her—

Ida, the wax doll, sat on the drawing-room sofa, dressed ready for the birthday. The darling had real person's eyes made of glass, and real eyelashes and hair. Little finger and toenails were marked in the wax, and she smelt of the lavender her clothes were laid in.

But Emily, the new birthday doll, smelt of composition and of gum and hay; she had flat, painted hair and eyes and a foolish look on her face, like Nurse's aunt, Mrs. Spinker,

when she said "Lawk-a-daisyl!" Although Papa had given her Emily she could never feel for her the real, loving love she felt for Ida.

And her mother had told her that she must lend Ida to Connie Hancock if Connie wanted her.

Mamma couldn't see that such a thing was not possible.

"My darling, you mustn't be selfish. You must do what your little guest wants."

"I can't."

But she had to; and she was sent out of the room because she cried. It was much nicer upstairs in the nursery with Mimi, the Angora cat. Mimi knew that something sorrowful had happened. He sat still, just lifting the root of his tail as you stroked him. If only she could have stayed there with Mimi; but in the end she had to go back to the drawing-room.

If only she could have told Mamma what it felt like to see Connie with Ida in her arms, squeezing her tight to her chest and patting her as if Ida had been *her* child. She kept on saying to herself that Mamma didn't know; she didn't know what she had done. And when it was all over she took the wax doll and put her in the long narrow box she had come in, and buried her in the bottom drawer in the spare room. She thought: If I can't have her to myself I won't have her at all. I've got Emily. I shall just have to pretend she's not an idiot.

She thought of Ida as dead; lying in her pasteboard coffin and buried in the wardrobe cemetery.

It was hard work pretending that Emily didn't look like Mrs. Spinker.

## II

SHE had a belief that her father's house was nicer than other people's houses. It stood off from the high road, in Black's Lane, at the head of the turn. You came to it by a row of tall elms standing up along Mr. Hancock's wall. Behind the last tree its slender white end went straight up from the pavement, hanging out a green balcony like a birdcage above the green door.

The lane turned sharp there and went on, and the long brown garden wall went with it. Behind the wall the lawn flowed down from the white house and the green verandah to the cedar tree at the bottom. Beyond the lawn was the

kitchen garden and beyond the kitchen garden the orchard; little crippled apple trees bending down in the long grass.

She was glad to come back to the house after the walk with Eliza, the nurse, or Annie, the housemaid; to go through all the rooms looking for Mimi; looking for Mamma, telling her what had happened.

"Mamma, the red-haired woman in the sweetie shop has got a little baby, and it's hair's red, too. . . . Some day I shall have a little baby. I shall dress him in a long gown—"

"Robe."

"Robe, with bands of lace all down it, as long as *that*; and a white christening cloak sewn with white roses. Won't he look sweet?"

"Very sweet."

"He shall have lots of hair. I sha'n't love him if he hasn't."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"No. He must have thick, flossy hair like Mimi, so that I can stroke him. Which would you rather have, a little girl or a little boy?"

"Well—what do you think—?"

"I think—perhaps I'd rather have a little girl."

She would be like Mamma, and her little girl would be like herself. She couldn't think of it any other way.

The school-treat was held in Mr. Hancock's field. All afternoon she had been with the children, playing Oranges and lemons, A ring, a ring of roses, and Here we come gathering nuts in May, *nuts* in May, *nuts* in May: over and over again. And she had helped her mother to hand cake and buns at the infants' table.

The guest-children's tea was served last of all, up on the lawn under the immense, brown brick, many windowed house. There wasn't room for everybody at the table, so the girls sat down first and the boys waited for their turn. Some of them were pushing and snatching.

She knew what she would have. She would begin with a bun, and go on through two sorts of jam to Madeira cake, and end with raspberries and cream. Or perhaps it would be safer to begin with raspberries and cream. She kept her face very still, so as not to look greedy, and tried not to stare at the Madeira cake lest people should see she was thinking

of it. Mrs. Hancock had given her somebody else's crumby plate. She thought: I'm not greedy. I'm really and truly hungry. She could draw herself in at the waist with a flat, exhausted feeling, like the two ends of a concertina coming together.

She was doing this when she saw her mother standing on the other side of the table, looking at her and making signs.

"If you've finished, Hatty, you'd better get up and let that little boy have something."

They were all turning round and looking at her. And there was the crumby plate before her. They were thinking: "That greedy little girl has gone on and on eating." She got up suddenly, not speaking, and left the table, the Madeira cake and the raspberries and cream. She could feel her skin all hot and wet with shame.

And now she was sitting up in the drawing-room at home. Her mother had brought her a piece of seed-cake and a cup of milk with the cream on it. Mamma's soft eyes kissed her as they watched her eating her cake with short crumby bites like a little cat. Mamma's eyes made her feel so good, so good.

"Why didn't you tell me you hadn't finished?"

"Finished? I hadn't even begun."

"Oh-h, darling, why didn't you *tell* me?"

"Because I—I don't know."

"Well, I'm glad my little girl didn't snatch and push. It's better to go without than to take from other people. That's ugly."

Ugly. Being naughty was just that. Doing ugly things. Being good was being beautiful like Mamma. She wanted to be like her mother. Sitting up there and being good felt delicious. And the smooth cream with the milk running under it, thin and cold, was delicious too.

Suddenly a thought came rushing at her. There was God and there was Jesus. But even God and Jesus were not more beautiful than Mamma. They couldn't be.

"You mustn't say things like that, Hatty; you mustn't, really. It might make something happen."

"Oh no, it won't. You don't suppose they're listening all the time."

Saying things like that made you feel good and at the same time naughty, which was more exciting than only

being one or the other. But Mamma's frightened face spoiled it. What did she think—what did she think God would do?

Red campion ———

At the bottom of the orchard a door in the wall opened into Black's Lane, below the three tall elms.

She couldn't believe she was really walking there by herself. It had come all of a sudden, the thought that she *must* do it, that she *must* go out into the lane; and when she found the door unlatched something seemed to take hold of her and push her out. She was forbidden to go into Black's Lane; she was not even allowed to walk there with Annie.

She kept on saying to herself: "I'm in the lane. I'm in the lane. I'm disobeying Mamma."

Nothing could undo that. She had disobeyed by just standing outside the orchard door. Disobedience was such a big and awful thing that it was waste not to do something big and awful with it. So she went on up, and up, past the three tall elms. She was a big girl, wearing black silk aprons and learning French. Walking by herself. When she arched her back and stuck her stomach out she felt like a tall lady in a crinoline and shawl. She swung her hips and made her skirts fly out. That was her grown-up crinoline swing—swinging as she went.

At the turn cows' parsley and rose campion began; on each side a long trail of white froth with the red tops of the campion pricking through. She made herself a nosegay.

Past the second turn you came to the waste ground covered with old boots and rusted, crumpled tins. The little dirty brown house stood there behind the rickety blue palings; narrow, like the piece of a house that has been cut in two. It hid, stooping under the ivy bush on its roof. It was not like the houses people live in; there was something queer, some secret, frightening thing about it.

The man came out and went to the gate and stood there. *He* was the frightening thing. When he saw her he stepped back and crouched behind the palings, ready to jump out.

She turned slowly, as if she had thought of something. She *mustn't* run. She *must not* run. If she ran he would come after her.

Her mother was coming down the garden walk, tall and beautiful in her silver grey gown with the bands of black velvet on the flounces and the sleeves; her wide, hooped skirts swung, brushing the flower borders.

She ran up to her, crying, "Mamma, I went up the lane where you told me not to."

"No, Hatty, no; you didn't."

You could see she wasn't angry. She was frightened.

"I did. I did."

Her mother took the bunch of flowers out of her hand and looked at it. "Yes," she said, "that's where the dark red campion grows."

She was holding the flowers up to her face. It was awful, for you could see her mouth thicken and redden over its edges and shake. She hid it behind the flowers. And somehow you knew it wasn't your naughtiness that made her cry. There was something more.

She was saying in a thick, soft voice, "It was wrong of you, my darling."

Suddenly she bent her tall straightness. "Rose campion," she said, parting the stems with her long, thin fingers. "Look, Hatty, how *beautiful* they are. Run away and put the poor things in water."

She was so quiet, so quiet, and her quietness hurt far more than if she had been angry.

She must have gone straight back into the house to Papa. Harriett knew, because he sent for her. He was quiet, too. . . . That was the little, hiding voice he told you secrets in. . . . She stood close up to him, between his knees, and his arm went loosely round her to keep her there while he looked into her eyes. You could smell tobacco and the queer, clean man's smell that came up out of him from his collar. He wasn't smiling; but somehow his eyes looked kinder than if they had smiled.

"Why did you do it, Hatty?"

"Because—I wanted to see what it would feel like."

"You mustn't do it again. Do you hear, you mustn't do it."

"Why?"

"Why? Because it makes your mother unhappy. That's enough why."

But there was something more. Mamma had been



frightened. Something to do with the frightening man in the lane.

"Why does it make her?"

She knew; she knew; but she wanted to see what he would say.

"I said that was enough. . . . Do you know what you've been guilty of?"

"Disobedience."

"More than that. Breaking trust. Meanness. It was mean and dishonourable of you when you knew you wouldn't be punished."

"Isn't there to be a punishment?"

"No. People are punished to make them remember. We want you to forget." His arm tightened, drawing her closer. And the kind, secret voice went on. "Forget ugly things. Understand, Hatty, nothing is forbidden. We don't forbid, because we trust you to do what we wish. To behave beautifully. . . . There, there."

She hid her face on his breast against his tickly coat, and cried.

She would always have to do what they wanted; the unhappiness of not doing it was more than she could bear. All very well to say there would be no punishment; *their* unhappiness was the punishment. It hurt more than anything. It kept on hurting when she thought about it.

The first minute of tomorrow she would begin behaving beautifully; as beautifully as she could. They wanted you to; they wanted it more than anything because they were so beautiful. So good. So wise.

But three years went before Harriett understood how wise they had been, and why her mother took her again and again into Black's Lane to pick red campion, so that it was always the red campion she remembered. They must have known all the time about Black's Lane; Annie the housemaid used to say it was a bad place; something had happened to a little girl there. Annie hushed and reddened and wouldn't tell you what it was. Then one day, when she was thirteen, standing by the apple tree, Connie Hancock told her. A secret. . . . Behind the dirty blue palings. . . . She shut her eyes, squeezing the lids down, frightened. But when she thought of the lane she could see nothing but the green banks, the three tall elms and the red campion pricking through the white froth of

the cows' parsley; her mother stood on the garden walk in her wide, swinging gown; she was holding the red and white flowers up to her face and saying, "Look, how *beautiful* they are."

She saw her all the time while Connie was telling her the secret. She wanted to get up and go to her. Connie knew what it meant when you stiffened suddenly and made yourself tall and cold and silent. The cold silence would frighten her and she would go away. Then, Harriett thought, she could get back to her mother and Longfellow.

Every afternoon through the hour before her father came home she sat in the cool, green-lighted drawing-room reading *Evangeline* aloud to her mother. When they came to the beautiful places they looked at each other and smiled.

She passed through her fourteenth year sedately, to the sound of *Evangeline*. Her upright body, her lifted, delicately obstinate, rather wistful face expressed her small, conscious determination to be good. She was silent with emotion when Mrs. Hancock told her she was growing like her mother.

### III

Connie Hancock was her friend.

She had once been a slender wide mouthed child, top-heavy with her damp clumps of hair. Now she was squaring and thickening and looking horrid, like Mr. Hancock. Beside her Harriett felt tall and elegant and slender.

Mamma didn't know what Connie was really like; it was one of those things you couldn't tell her. She said Connie would grow out of it. Meanwhile you could see *he* wouldn't. Mr. Hancock had red whiskers, and his face squatted down in his collar, instead of rising nobly up out of it like Papa's. It looked as if it was thinking things that made its eyes bulge and its mouth curl over and slide like a drawn loop. When you talked about Mr. Hancock Papa gave a funny laugh as if he was something improper. He said Connie ought to have red whiskers.

Mrs. Hancock, Connie's mother, was Mamma's dearest friend. That was why there had always been Connie. She could remember her, squirming and spluttering in her high nurse's chair. And there had always been Mrs. Hancock,

refined and mournful, looking at you with gentle, disappointed eyes.

She was glad that Connie hadn't been sent to her boarding-school, so that nothing could come between her and Priscilla Heaven.

Priscilla was her real friend.

It had begun in her third term when Priscilla first came to the school, unhappy and shy, afraid of the new faces. Harriett took her to her room.

She was thin, thin, in her shabby black velvet jacket. She stood looking at herself in the greenish glass over the yellow painted chest of drawers. Her heavy black hair had dragged the net and broken it. She put up her thin arms, helpless.

"They'll never keep me," she said. "I'm so untidy."

"It wants more pins," said Harriett. "Ever so many more pins. If you put them in head downwards they'll fall out. I'll show you."

Priscilla trembled with joy when Harriett asked her to walk with her; she had been afraid of her at first because she behaved so beautifully.

Soon they were always together. They sat side by side at the dinner table and in school, black head and golden brown leaning to each other over the same book; they walked side by side in the packed procession going two by two. They slept in the same room, the two white beds drawn close together; a white dimity curtain hung between; they drew it back so that they could see each other lying there in the summer dusk and in the clear mornings when they waked.

Harriett loved Priscilla's odd, dusk-white face; her long hound's nose, seeking; her wide mouth, restless between her shallow, fragile jaws; her eyes, black, cleared with spots of jade grey, prominent, showing white rims when she was startled. She started at sudden noises; she quivered and stared when you caught her dreaming; she cried when the organ burst out triumphantly in church. You had to take care every minute that you didn't hurt her.

She cried when term ended and she had to go home. Priscilla's home was horrible. Her father drank, her mother fretted; they were poor; a rich aunt paid for her schooling.

When the last midsummer holidays came she spent them with Harriett.

"Oh-h-h!" Prissie drew in her breath when she heard they were to sleep together in the big bed in the spare room. She went about looking at things, curious, touching them softly as if they were sacred. She loved the two rough-coated china lambs on the chimney piece, and "Oh—the dear little china boxes with the flowers sitting up on them."

But when the bell rang she stood quivering in the doorway.

"I'm afraid of your father and mother, Hatty. They won't like me. I *know* they won't like me."

"They will. They'll love you," Hatty said.

And they did. They were sorry for the little white-faced, palpitating thing.

It was their last night. Priscilla wasn't going back to school again. Her aunt, she said, was only paying for a year. They lay together in the big bed, dim face to face, talking.

"Hatty—if you wanted to do something most awfully, more than anything else in the world, and it was wrong, would you be able not to do it?"

"I hope so. I *think* I would, because I'd know if I did it would make Papa and Mamma unhappy."

"Yes, but suppose it was giving up something you wanted, something you loved more than them—could you?"

"Yes. If it was wrong for me to have it. And I couldn't love anything more than them."

"But if you did, you'd give it up."

"I'd have to."

"Hatty—I couldn't."

"Oh yes, *you* could if *I* could."

"No. No. . . ."

"How do you know you couldn't?"

"Because I haven't. I—I oughtn't to have gone on staying here. My father's ill. They wanted me to go to them and I wouldn't go."

"Oh, Prissie——"

"There, you see. But I couldn't. I couldn't. I was so happy here with you. I couldn't give it up."

"If your father had been like Papa you would have."

"Yes. I'd do anything for *him*, because he's your father. It's you I couldn't give up."

"You'll have to some day."

"When—when?"

"When somebody else comes. When you're married."

"I shall never marry. Never. I shall never want anybody but you. If we could always be together. . . . I can't think *why* people marry, Hatty."

"Still," Hatty said, "they do."

"It's because they haven't ever cared as you and me care. . . . Hatty, if I don't marry anybody, *you* won't, will you?"

"I'm not thinking of marrying anybody."

"No. But promise, promise on your honour you won't ever."

"I'd rather not *promise*. You see, I might. I shall love you all the same, Priscilla, all my life."

"No, you won't. It'll all be different. I love you more than you love me. But I shall love you all my life and it won't be different. I shall never marry."

"Perhaps I shan't, either," Harriett said.

They exchanged gifts. Harriet gave Priscilla a rose-wood writing desk inlaid with mother o' pearl, and Priscilla gave Harriett a pockethandkerchief case she had made herself of fine grey canvas embroidered with blue flowers like a sampler and lined with blue and white plaid silk. On the top part you read "Pockethandkerchiefs" in blue lettering, and on the bottom "Harriett Freat," and, tucked away in one corner, "Priscilla Heaven, September: 1861."

#### IV

SHE remembered the conversation. Her father sitting, straight and slender, in his chair, talking in that quiet voice of his that never went sharp or deep or quavering, that paused now and then on an amused inflection, his long lips straightening between the perpendicular grooves of his smile. She loved his straight, slender face, clean-shaven, the straight, slightly jutting jaw, the dark-blue flattish eyes under the black eyebrows, the silver-grizzled hair that fitted close like a cap, curling in a silver brim above his ears.

He was talking about his business as if more than anything it amused him.

"There's nothing gross and material about stockbrok-

ing. It's like pure mathematics. You're dealing in abstractions, ideal values, all the time. You calculate—in curves." His hand, holding the unlit cigar, drew a curve, a long graceful one, in mid-air. "You know what's going to happen all the time. . . . The excitement begins when you don't quite know and you risk it; when it's getting dangerous. . . . The higher mathematics of the game. If you can afford them; if you haven't a wife and family—I can see the fascination. . . ."

He sat, holding his cigar in one hand, looking at it without seeing it, seeing the fascination and smiling at it, amused and secure.

And her mother, bending over her bead-work, smiled too, out of their happiness, their security.

He would lean back, smoking his cigar and looking at them out of contented, half-shut eyes, as they switched, one at each end of the long canvas fender stool. He was waiting, he said, for the moment when their heads would come bumping together in the middle.

Sometimes they would sit like that, not exchanging ideas, exchanging only the sense of each other's presence, a secure, profound satisfaction that belonged as much to their bodies as their minds; it rippled on their faces with their quiet smiling, it breathed with their breath. Sometimes she or her mother read aloud, Mrs. Browning or Charles Dickens; or the Biography of some Great Man, sitting there in the velvet curtained room or out on the lawn under the cedar tree. A motionless communion broken by walks in the sweet smelling fields and deep elm-screened lanes. And there were short journeys into London to a lecture or a concert, and now and then the surprise and excitement of the play.

One day her mother smoothed out her long hanging curls and tucked them away under a net. Harriett had a little shock of dismay and resentment, hating change.

And the long, long Sundays spaced the weeks and the months, hushed and sweet and rather enervating, yet with a sort of thrill in them as if somewhere the music of the church organ went on vibrating. Her mother had some secret: some happy sense of God that she gave to you and you took from her as you took food and clothing, but not quite knowing what it was, feeling that there was something more in it, some hidden gladness, some perfection that you missed.

Her father had his secret too. She felt that it was harder, somehow, darker and dangerous. He read dangerous books: Darwin and Huxley and Herbert Spencer. Sometimes he talked about them.

"There's a sort of fascination in seeing how far you can go. . . . The fascination of truth might be just that—the risk that after all it mayn't be true, that you may have to go farther and farther, perhaps never come back."

Her mother looked up with her bright, still eyes.

"I trust the truth. I know that, however far you go, you'll come back some day."

"I believe you see all of them—Darwin and Huxley and Herbert Spencer—coming back," he said.

"Yes, I do."

His eyes smiled, loving her. But you could see it amused him, too, to think of them, all those reckless, courageous thinkers, coming back, to share her secret. His thinking was just a dangerous game he played.

She looked at her father with a kind of awe as he sat there, reading his book, in danger and yet safe.

She wanted to know what that fascination was. She took down Herbert Spencer and tried to read him. She made a point of finishing every book she had begun, for her pride couldn't bear being beaten. Her head grew hot and heavy: she read the same sentences over and over again; they had no meaning; she couldn't understand a single word of Herbert Spencer. He had beaten her. As she put the book back in its place she said to herself "I mustn't. If I go on, if I get to the interesting part I may lose my faith." And soon she made herself believe that this was really the reason why she had given it up.

Besides Connie Hancock there were Lizzie Pierce and Sarah Barmby.

Exquisite pleasure to walk with Lizzie Pierce. Lizzie's walk was a sliding, swooping dance of little pointed feet, always as if she were going out to meet somebody, her sharp, black-eyed face darting and turning.

"My *dear*, he kept on doing *this*" (Lizzie did it) "as if he was trying to sit on himself to keep from flying off into space like a cork. Fancy proposing on three tumblers of soda water! I might have been Mrs. Pennefather but for that."

Lizzie went about laughing, laughing at everybody, looking for something to laugh at everywhere. Now and then she would stop suddenly to contemplate the vision she had created.

"If Connie didn't wear a bustle—Or, oh my dear, if Mr. Hancock did ——."

"Mr. Hancock!" Clear, firm laughter, chiming and tinkling.

"Goodness! To think how many ridiculous people there are in the world!"

"I believe you see something ridiculous in me."

"Only when—only when—"

She swung her parasol in time to her sing-song. She wouldn't say when.

"Lizzie—Not—*not* when I'm in my black lace fichu and the little round hat?"

"Oh dear me—no. Not *then*."

The little round hat, Lizzie wore one like it herself, tilted forward, perched on her chignon.

"Well then—" she pleaded.

Lizzie's face darted its teasing, mysterious smile.

She loved Lizzie best of her friends after Priscilla. She loved her mockery and her teasing wit.

And there was Lizzie's friend, Sarah Barmby, who lived in one of those little shabby villas on the London road and looked after her father. She moved about the villa in an unseeing, shambling way, hitting herself against the furniture. Her face was heavy with a gentle, brooding goodness, and she had little eyes that blinked and twinkled in the heaviness as if something amused her. At first you kept on wondering what the joke was till you saw it was only a habit Sarah had. She came when she could spare time from her father.

Next to Lizzie, Harriett loved Sarah. She loved her goodness.

And Connie Hancock, bouncing about hospitably in the large, rich house. Tea-parties and dances at the Hancocks'.

She wasn't sure that she liked dancing. There was something obscurely dangerous about it. She was afraid of being lifted off her feet and swung on and on, away from her safe, happy life. She was stiff and abrupt with her partners, convinced that none of those men who liked Connie Hancock could like her, and anxious to show them that she



didn't expect them to. She was afraid of what they were thinking. And she would slip away early, running down the garden to the gate at the bottom of the lane where her father waited for her. She loved the still coldness of the night under the elms, and the strong, tight feeling of her father's arm when she hung on it leaning towards him, and his "There we are!" as he drew his closer. Her mother would look up from the sofa and ask always the same question, "Well, did anything nice happen?"

Till at last she answered, "No. Did you think it would, Mamma?"

"You never know," said her mother.

"I know everything."

"Everything?"

"Everything that could happen at the Hancocks' dances."

Her mother shook her head at her. She knew that in secret Mamma was glad; but she answered the reproof.

"It's mean of me to say that when I've eaten four of their ices. They were strawberry, and chocolate and vanilla, all in one."

"Well, they won't last much longer."

"Not at that rate," her father said.

"I meant the dances," said her mother.

And sure enough, soon after Connie's engagement to young Mr. Pennefather they ceased.

And the three friends, Connie and Sarah and Lizzie, came and went. She loved them; and yet when they were there they broke something, something secret and precious between her and her father and mother, and when they were gone she felt the stir, the happy movement of coming together again, drawing in close, close, after the break.

"We only want each other." Nobody else really mattered, not even Priscilla Heaven.

Year after year the same. Her mother parted her hair into two sleek wings; she wore a rosette and lappets of black velvet and lace on a glistening beetle-backed chignon. And Harriett felt again her shock of resentment. She hated to think of her mother subject to change and time.

And Priscilla came year after year, still loving, still protesting that she would never marry. Yet they were glad when even Priscilla had gone and left them to each other. Only each other, year after year the same.

## V

PRISCILLA'S last visit was followed by another passionate vow that she would never marry. Then within three weeks she wrote again, telling of her engagement to Robin Lethbridge.

. . . "I haven't known him very long and Mamma says it's too soon; but he makes me feel as if I had known him all my life. I know I said I wouldn't, but I couldn't tell; I didn't know it would be so different. I couldn't have believed that anybody could be so happy. You won't mind, Hatty. We can love each other just the same." . . .

Incredible that Priscilla, who could be so beaten down and crushed by suffering, should have risen to such an ecstasy. Her letters had a swinging lilt, a harried beat, like a song bursting, a heart beating for joy too fast.

It would have to be a long engagement. Robin was in a provincial bank, and he had his way to make. Then, a year later, Prissy wrote and told them that Robin had got a post in Parson's Bank in the City. He didn't know a soul in London. Would they be kind to him and let him come to them sometimes, on Saturdays and Sundays?

He came one Sunday. Harriett had wondered what he would be like, and he was tall, slender-waisted, wide-shouldered; he had a square, very white forehead; his brown hair was parted on one side, half curling at the tips above his ears. His eyes—thin, black crystal, shining, turning, showing speckles of brown and grey; perfectly set under straight eyebrows laid very black on the white skin. His round, pouting chin had a dent in it. The face in between was thin and irregular; the nose straight and serious and rather long in profile, with a dip and a rise at three-quarters; in full face straight again but shortened. His eyes had another meaning, deeper and steadier than his fine slender mouth; but it was the mouth that made you look at him. One arch of the bow was higher than the other; now and then it quivered with an uneven, sensitive movement of its own.

She noticed his mouth's little dragging droop at the corners and thought: "Oh, you're cross. If you're cross with Prissy—if you make her unhappy"—but when he caught her looking at him the cross lips drew back in a sudden, white, confiding smile. And when he spoke she understood why he had been irresistible to Priscilla.

He had come three Sundays now, four perhaps; she had

lost count. They were all sitting out on the lawn under the cedar. Suddenly, as if he had just thought of it, he said:

"It's extraordinarily good of you to have me."

"Oh, well," her mother said, "Prissie is Hatty's greatest friend."

"I supposed that was why you do it."

He didn't want it to be that. He wanted it to be himself. Himself. He was proud. He didn't like to owe anything to other people, not even to Prissie.

Her father smiled at him. "You must give us time."

He would never give it or take it. You could see him tearing at things in his impatience, to know them, to make them give themselves up to him at once. He came rushing to give himself up, all in a minute, to make himself known.

"It isn't fair," he said. "I know you so much better than you know me. Priscilla's always talking about you. But you don't know anything about *me*."

"No. We've got all the excitement."

"And the risk, sir."

"And of course, the risk." He liked him.

She could talk to Robin Lethbridge as she couldn't talk to Connie Hancock's young men. She wasn't afraid of what he was thinking. She was safe with him, he belonged to Priscilla Heaven. He liked her because he loved Priscilla; but he wanted her to like him, not because of Priscilla, but for himself.

She talked about Priscilla: "I never saw anybody so loving. It used to frighten me; because you can hurt her so easily."

"Yes. Poor little Prissie, she's very vulnerable," he said.

When Priscilla came to stay it was almost painful. Her eyes clung to him, and wouldn't let him go. If he left the room she was restless, unhappy till he came back. She went out for long walks with him and returned silent, with a tired, beaten look. She would lie on the sofa, and he would hang over her, gazing at her with strained, unhappy eyes.

After she had gone he kept on coming more than ever, and he stayed over night. Harriett had to walk with him now. He wanted to talk, to talk about himself, endlessly.

When she looked in the glass she saw a face she didn't know: bright-eyed, flushed, pretty. The little arrogant lift had gone. As if it had been somebody else's face she asked herself, in wonder, without rancour, why nobody had ever

cared for it. Why? Why? She could see her father looking at her, intent, as if he wondered. And one day her mother said, "Do you think you ought to see so much of Robin? Do you think it's quite fair to Prissie?"

"Oh—*Mamma* . . . I wouldn't. I haven't—"

"I know. You couldn't if you would, Hatty. You would always behave beautifully. But are you so sure about Robin?"

"Oh, he *couldn't* care for *anybody* but Prissie. It's only because he's so safe with me, because he knows I don't and he doesn't—"

The wedding day was fixed for July. After all, they were going to risk it. By the middle of June the wedding presents began to come in.

Harriett and Robin Lethbridge were walking up Black's Lane. The hedges were a white bridal froth of cows' parsley. Every now and then she swerved aside to pick the red campion.

He spoke suddenly. "Do you know what a dear little face you have, Hatty? It's so clear and still and it behaves so beautifully."

"Does it?"

She thought of Prissie's face, dark and restless, never clear, never still.

"You're not a bit like what I expected. Prissie doesn't know what you are. You don't know yourself."

"I know what *she* is."

His mouth's uneven quiver beat in and out like a pulse.

"Don't talk to me about Prissie!"

Then he got it out. He tore it out of himself. He loved her.

"Oh, Robin—" Her fingers loosened in her dismay; she went dropping red campion.

It was no use, he said, to think about Prissie. He couldn't marry her. He couldn't marry anybody but Hatty, Hatty must marry him.

"You can't say you don't love me, Hatty."

No. She couldn't say it; for it wouldn't be true.

"Well, then—"

"I can't. I'd be doing wrong, Robin. I feel all the time as if she belonged to you; as if she were married to you."

"But she isn't. It isn't the same thing."

"To me it is. You can't undo it. It would be dishonorable."

"Not half so dishonorable as marrying her when I don't love her."

"Yes. As long as she loves you. She hasn't anybody but you. She was so happy. So happy. Think of the cruelty of it. Think of what we should send her back to."

"You think of Prissie. You don't think of me."

"Because it would *kill* her."

"How about you?"

"It can't kill us, because we know we love each other. Nothing can take that from us."

"But I couldn't be happy with her, Hatty. She wears me out. She's so restless."

"*We* couldn't be happy, Robin. We should always be thinking of what we did to her. How could we be happy?"

"You know how."

"Well, even if we were, we've no right to get our happiness out of her suffering."

"Oh, Hatty, why are you so good, so good?"

"I'm not good. It's only—there are some things you can't do. We couldn't. We couldn't."

"No," he said at last. "I don't suppose we could. Whatever it's like I've got to go through with it."

He didn't stay that night.

*(To be continued.)*